



# THE MOVIE

M A G A Z I N E

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**MERYL STREEP CHOOSES**  
*Sophie's Choice*

*The Dark Crystal's*  
**DAZZLING SPECIAL EFFECTS**

**JESSICA LANGE AS**  
**FRANCES FARMER,**  
**TRAGIC THIRTIES STAR**

**TONY BILL DIRECTS**  
**SOME MOORES (DUDLEY**  
**& MARY TYLER, THAT IS)**

*Previews of*  
**THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE,**  
**STING II &**  
**VIDEODROME!**



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### *The Perspective*

During the short 70 years since the birth of the motion picture industry, movies have defined our heroes, shaped our morality, set the pace for fashion, created national controversy, entertained us, provided new perspectives and perhaps best of all, stimulated our imaginations.

It's difficult to comprehend the true scope and power of the film medium. Yet we all know the magic created when facing a big screen and being touched by *Breaking Away*, thrilled by *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, moved by *Ordinary People*, or charmed by *E.T.*

Whether the film industry provides escape or entertainment, makes us laugh or makes us cry, it is an important part of our culture and our lifestyle.

You, as a reader of *The Movie Magazine*, belong to the most active movie-going segments of the population. As such, you have a tremendous influence on the film industry and the movies it makes. *The Movie Magazine* is designed to bring the personalities and the process of creating motion pictures into clearer focus. We hope to provide interesting insights into upcoming films — films whose creation you have directly influenced and which eventually may influence you.

We invite your input and encourage you to write us with your comments.

**Durand Achée**  
Publisher

## THE MOVIE

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# THE DARK CRYSTAL

Special Effects Wizards Create A Mystical New World

BY JACOB A. ATLAS

It sounds like a producer's dream. No agents to call, no contracts to negotiate, no star salaries to pay, no temperamental actors to placate. In fact, no actors at all.

*The Dark Crystal* is the brainchild of Muppet creator Jim Henson. Henson came up with the idea of making a film populated only with creatures (he has no other definition for what he creates, noting this latest development is neither a puppet nor a muppet) five years ago, before *E.T.* was even a gleam in Steven Spielberg's eye. But *E.T.* has already become a national treasure. Any film which uses mechanical creatures to tug at our heartstrings is bound to be labeled a bandwagon jumper, whether deservedly or not. Can the man who made Kermit the Frog and Miss Piggy lovers for the Seventies and realized the Yoda for George Lucas take on the challenge of the lumpy, lovable Extraterrestrial?

"I never intended to spend five years making *The Dark Crystal*," admits Henson. He speaks with the slow, soft deliberation of a kindergarten teacher. "I was ready to go sooner but Lord Lew Grade (who financed the Muppet movies) wanted to make *The Muppet Movie* first. I figured why not postpone *Crystal* a little longer? I knew we could use the time for research and development.

"The big plus about the postponement," Henson adds, laughing, "is that at least now I can describe *The Dark Crystal* to people and have them understand what I mean. Before when I'd talk about a movie without people, no one knew what I meant. Now I can say it's on the order of *E.T.* or *Yoda*, only more so."

Much more. *E.T.* and *Yoda* were the only manipulated creatures interacting with a cast of humans, while *The Dark Crystal* is all manipulated creatures interacting with other manipulated creatures and special effects.

The logistics have nightmarish proportions, but Henson shrugs off the obstacles.

(l. to r.):  
Henson,  
Kurtz  
& Oz

"In the early days of movies," Henson explains, "all you could do was put a man in a gorilla suit. Now there are options. You can create almost anything. Anything you can see in your mind you can put on film."

Yes, if you have the time, the money and the craftspeople to do the job. *The Dark Crystal*, for instance, ate up five years, more than \$20 million in production costs, and the talents of hundreds of skilled laborers, from the usual camera and lighting experts to the not-usual false-eye experts and even rubber importers.

Not many filmmakers could have found the financial backing for a film as complex and unprecedented as *The Dark Crystal*. George Lucas, certainly; Steven Spielberg, now that *E.T.* proves he can do no wrong; and Henson. Although Henson is a generation older than either Lucas or Spielberg (he has grown children, one of whom is the editor of Harvard's prestigious *Lampoon*), he shares with them a sense of perpetual childhood. It was Henson who kept the vision alive, Henson who brought in artist Brian Froud to design the look of the picture, Henson who co-directed with fellow Muppeteer Frank Oz (the creator of both Miss Piggy and Yoda).

*The Dark Crystal's* story (by Henson; David Odell wrote the screenplay) is a traditional fable in an imaginary world where rivers whisper and mountains move. Characters come from races of Gelflings, Skeksis, Mystics and Garthims. Like most fables, the story is about the battle between good and evil where a loner hero, Jen, must prove his worth and deliver the world from greed and decay. Shades of Luke Skywalker and the Empire.

Says Henson, "I had created creatures for *Saturday Night Live* which were unlike anything I had done for the Muppets. Those creatures moved more realistically and all of a sudden I started thinking along new lines. I wanted to do something that obscured the line between what was a puppet and what was human."

It was artist Brian Froud, most noted for his best-selling book, *Faeries*, who articulated the look of *The Dark Crystal*. The film combines the fanciful with the romantic, art deco with Victoriana. What Henson wanted and what Froud designed was a world of total anthropomorphism; every element in the world is

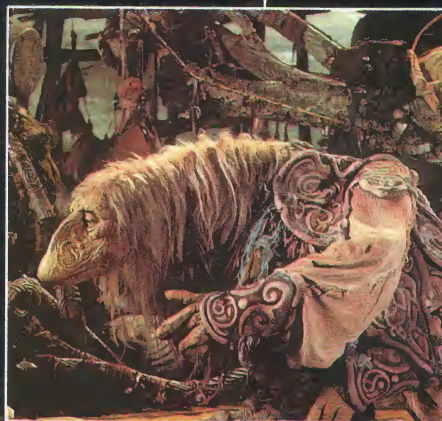


alive and possesses its own personality, its own history, its own complex set of emotions.

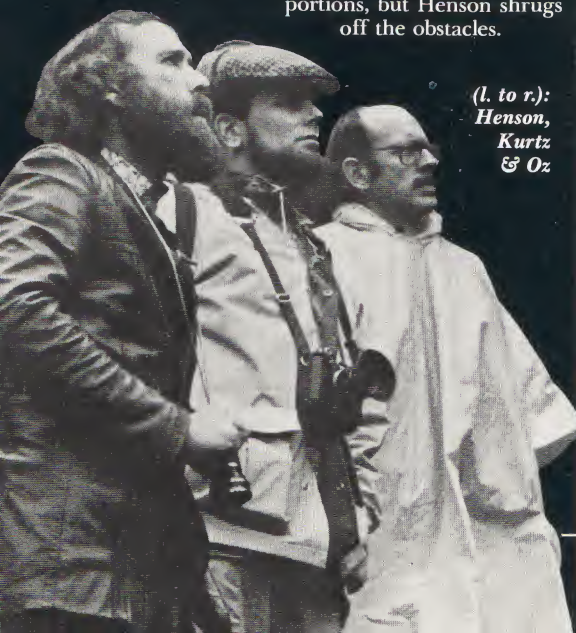
Froud interpreted Henson's thoughts, after which hundreds of people — molders, modelers, technicians, fabricators and mechanical designers — turned those thoughts into reality. Work on *The Dark Crystal's* creatures began as early as 1979 when Henson and his cohorts were still filming *The Great Muppet Caper*. Many of the more than 450 experts who eventually contributed to making *The Dark Crystal* had never before worked in movies. Explains a production coordinator, "We needed people who were flexible. Some of the ideas Jim had sounded strange."

Quite strange. For instance the Skeksis, the evil masters of the Dark Crystal, are described as having birdlike faces, beak-like mouths, extra hands and a reptilian tail. The Garthim, the warriors who carry out the orders of the Skeksis, are beetle-like creatures with lobster claws, while the Landstriders have long legs, friendly faces and an anatomy based on giraffes. Each and every creature had to move realistically, requiring dozens of movable parts, naturalistic skin and expressional eyes.

The eyes gave the filmmakers the most problems. Without believable eyes the creatures would be able to perform but not to act. After all, as some critic once said, all good movie actors speak with their eyes. At first the movie-makers went the traditional route, experimenting with taxidermists and the waxmakers at Madame Tussaud's. Eventually they settled on technicians who design eyes for humans who have lost them due to accident or illness. After a year and a half the eyes finally satisfied Henson and Froud. A major stumbling block: the technicians had refused to make the irises red. It just offended their professional pride.



Some of the creatures: a Mystic (above & top, with Gelfling Jen) & a Garthim Warrior (opposite page).





Another major problem was skin. Henson insisted that his heroes, the Gelflings Jen and Kira, have humanlike skin. It needed to move, catch the light. Eventually foam latex was used and master make-up man Dick Smith, who created the Oscar-winning make-up for Dustin Hoffman's 120-year-old *Little Big Man*, came in as an advisor. By the time *The Dark Crystal* was completed, more than nine tons of Malaysian rubber had been used to cover the creatures.

Making them move was equally problematical. Henson wanted no jerks, no ticks, no hesitation. "I don't like to get too specific about how the creatures were made to work," says Henson, "but we did use people inside them some of the time. They were mimes and clowns and acrobats, people who know movement. Those who did the movements were brought in very early and helped us work on the creatures."

Producer Gary Kurtz, whose credits include both *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*, insists the mimes were used only about five per cent of the time. The rest of the movements were accomplished through various techniques: radio control, mechanical linkage, hydraulic engineering and even traditional puppetry — the old arm-in-the-sleeve trick.

Henson admits the result of all the mechanics was often chaos. "E.T., for instance, was often manipulated by as many as eight people at one time — that's just for one creature. With us it was a matter of dozens of creatures performing at the same time. It got pretty crowded." Frank Oz, who co-directed the movie with Henson, likened the set to Grand Central Station. A traffic cop would have come in handy. Video saved the day.

"Without TV monitors we couldn't have made the movie," admits Henson who first developed the technique of watching a TV monitor while working the Muppets for *Sesame Street*. "The video goes through the camera and shows us exactly what's going on. When we are performing our primary focus is the video monitor. Each person who manipulated a creature had his own monitor. There were even tiny monitors inside the creatures for the mimes to see what they were doing."

Henson insists *The Dark Crystal* is not a traditional special effects movie in the sense of *Star Wars*. But in another sense the entire movie is one enormous special effect. The difference is that most of the effects in *The Dark Crystal* were accomplished during the shooting on the soundstages of EMI in London, not added during post-production.

Kurtz contradicts Henson and says that a great deal of the picture is accomplished through such traditional special effects as matte paintings, miniatures, models and even blue screens. Most effects are created serially — one aspect of an effect is shot on a piece of film, then another, then another until all the elements are finally married in optical printing. Special effects experts on *The Dark Crystal*, Roy Field and Brian Smithies, both veterans of James Bond and Superman movies, confirm Kurtz's assessment but add that much of what we see in the movie was accomplished on the set. Waterfalls, smoking orbs, flaming caskets were all exploded right on the soundstages.

For Field and Smithies the most difficult effect was aging the Garthim monster and the Mystics. "Usually," explains Smithies, "aging is

done with dissolves. But what we wanted was to show the process happening, so we created a vacuum effect where the skulls collapsed inward on command."

"In the first scene of the film," Smithies says, "the Dying Master, when telling Jen of his task, raises from a bowl of water the image of the crystal shard and Aughard's mountain (she's a sorceress). This could have been done with a series of models and dissolves, but we sculpted the mountain from ice and shot it in reverse, using stop frame and melting the ice each time. It took about four hours and we had to keep the ice at freezing point because we also had light coming up underneath which naturally warmed the water.

"The same applied to the crystal shard. Both those scenes having been shot were then improved optically by cutting out frames to speed up the sequence and doing a partial dissolve between frames to get away from the slight jerky movement that you get when you do stop frame."

(Interestingly, *Revenge of the Jedi*, the sixth *Star Wars* adventure, uses no stop frame action. Instead, Lucasfilm's special effects arm, Industrial Light and Magic, developed something they call go-motion, which eliminates the jerks. Go-motion was first seen in the otherwise forgettable *Dragonslayer* and earned an Oscar nomination for ILM.)

For all the technique, Henson is well aware that what draws people to a movie is story, imagination, a sense of magic. With fantasy films, perhaps more than with any other genre of filmmaking, a bond occurs between the storyteller and the audience. If that bond isn't created the movie lies flat and dull.

Henson, through his Muppets, has proven he can create such a bond. Like Spielberg and Lucas, Henson has a gift for translating the



fantastical into popular form. "I make movies I want to go see," Henson says simply, echoing the exact same words Lucas used to explain why he made *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

*The Dark Crystal* opens December 17th.

## Streep . . .

(Continued from page 4)

Streep, along with the German-Polish contingent of the *Sophie's Choice* crew, spent four weeks filming the flashback episodes of the story in Zagreb, Yugoslavia — scenes aswirl with images of family and friends, sprawling ghettos, the constant rumble of trains and, in the end, the concentration camp.

"During that month I spoke no English at all," Streep recalls. "I spoke only Polish or German, and it was a Polish and German cast. They were all real. I was the only ringer."

Streep starts gushing all over the place when she gets going on her craft, recounting the roles that have plopped her in places like Cornwall, England, circa 1860, or Poland in the 1930s; her work in movies like *Julia* (Streep's film debut), *The Deerhunter*, *Manhattan*, *The Seduction of Joe Tynan*. "It's great. How many people get to live that many lives in their lifetime? That's really the whole kick of acting: jumping into these different circumstances. It's an ideal outlet for all sorts of emotions."

Prior to *Sophie's Choice* and the Silkwood picture which is just underway, Streep starred in *Still of the Night*, a suspense thriller in which she plays a wealthy New York art auctioneer who gets embroiled in a mystery and a love affair with her psychiatrist, played by Roy Scheider. Robert Benton, who directed Streep in her academy award-winning performance in *Kramer vs. Kramer*, was the director. Streep is loath to give away much of the story line for *Still of the Night*, suggesting only that the less known the better. "It's a very glamorous character, though," she offers. "I got some nice clothes out of it. It's a very glossy, dark, glamorous movie. I've never really been in a glamorous movie before."

Streep clears her throat. She runs a hand through her hair, shaking it up. Two gold, leaf-shaped earrings jangle against her long neck. The talk about glamour winds its way around to that age-old celebrity subject: fame and fortune. Streep, one of a select few American actresses who can demand million dollar per-picture salaries, an actress constantly deluged with scripts and movie offers, is trying, amidst all the stardom and the media hype, to maintain a life of relative normality. She is consciously trying to avoid becoming spoiled by the whole Hollywood syndrome — the aides in constant attendance, the limousines, the big parties.

"You can't get spoiled if you do your own ironing," the actress philosophizes, a grin crossing her pale, pointed face. Is she trying to hoodwink an unsuspecting public into believing that Meryl Streep — the same Meryl Streep who adorned the covers of practically every magazine in America last year — does her own ironing?

"Well," she concedes, her eyes sparked with amusement, "I must say I'm very into permanent press. But, I mean, I think it's important — for me — to keep a hand on my life and the maintenance of it because you're supposed to be playing characters that do their own ironing. If you forget how to do it then all you can play are movie stars."

"But you gotta love it," she adds, her voice swooping from one octave to another, "you gotta love it at the airport when they have the car waiting for you, I must say. Holy mac-kerel! You don't have to wait for anything and the guy carries the bag — that's great. You'd be a jerk not to love that."

*Sophie's Choice* opens Dec. 10 in exclusive engagements in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco/San Jose, Washington, Dallas and Toronto; other selected markets will open January 21, 1983.